R E P O R T  R E S U M E S

ED 014 512 UD 004 077

NORTHERN SCHOOL DESEGREGATION, INTRODUCTION TO YESHIVA UNIVERSITY'S PROCEEDINGS OF THE INVITATIONAL CONFERENCE ON NORTHERN SCHOOL DESEGREGATION--PROGRESS AND PROBLEMS, P. 11-16. (TITLE SUPPLIED).

BY- LOWELL, STANLEY H.

PUB DATE 29 APR 62

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$0.32 6P.

DESCRIPTORS- *PUBLIC SCHOOLS, *SCHOOL INTEGRATION, ETHICAL VALUES, BOARDS OF EDUCATION, OPEN ENROLLMENT, INTEGRATION METHODS, NORTHERN SCHOOLS, NEW YORK CITY, NEW YORK CITY COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

THIS CONFERENCE PAPER DISCUSSES DE FACTO SCHOOL DESEGREGATION IN NEW YORK CITY AND THE BOARD OF EDUCATION'S OPEN ENROLLMENT PLAN AND OTHER EFFORTS TO BRING ABOUT SCHOOL INTEGRATION. IN THE COURSE OF THIS DISCUSSION THE PARTICIPATION OF THE NEW YORK CITY COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS IN THESE EFFORTS IS EXPLAINED. (EF)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

ED014512



INTRODUCTION

Mr. Stanley H. Lowell, Chairman
New York City Commission on Human Rights

---

I am privileged to chair the panel on "Northern School Desegregation" on this occasion of the 75th anniversary of the founding of Yeshiva University.

I will address myself briefly to four aspects of this timely subject: First, let us look at the dimensions of the problem of segregated schooling as it affects us in the North ...Second, let us touch upon the relationship between the northern and southern aspects of this problem...Third, let us consider the moral value at the root of the problem... And, finally, let us examine the reason why it is especially fitting for such a discussion to take place at Yeshiva University.

The words of your great president, Dr. Samuel Belkin, suggest our point of departure. For it was he who said that, "Knowledge is important, not only for the continuance of our cultural heritage, but for the preservation of life itself. Recognition of the moral law is of paramount importance for the survival of life itself".

It was moral law, in great measure, that led to the founding on Bill of Rights Day in December, 1955 of the Commission on Human Rights (then known as COIR). With Major Robert F. Wagner's strong support, the City Council in that year enacted Local Law 55, possibly the nation's most comprehensive human rights statute. Briefly, the law charged the Commission to eliminate discrimination whether it was practiced consciously or accidentally by public agencies, private corporations, groups or individuals.

The reasons for the passage of such a law in New York City are quite obvious. In many ways we lead the nation ...and the world. But we also have our problems, among them intolerance, bigotry, discrimination and segregation. You might call ours "accidental segregation" or, as we in the legal profession refer to it, de facto segregation. It is against the law...against public policy, but it still lingers on.

The establishment of the Commission on Human Rights--

UD004074

throwing the full weight of policy and law behind anti-bias programs and policies--marked one turning point in our history. Now we are about to enter the next phase. It is quite possible that the time has come for a careful reexamination of our traditional concepts in the much-discussed areas of equality and integration--a reexamination which would carry us beyond theoretical promises to living realities.

In the City of New York, the Commission, other public agencies, many private organizations and such splendid educational institutions as yours have succeeded in reshaping the public's mind. Today bias is unfashionable. We should follow up on this advantage. We should use this time to plan and execute concrete action programs which would channel this new thinking in positive directions.

A look at the Census figures tells us that almost half (48 per cent actually) of the 18 million Negroes in this country now live outside the 11 states which once-formed... and sometimes act is if they are still a part of the Confederacy. According to the 1960 Census figures, New York City alone has 1,087,000 Negro citizens. Taking New York, Chicago, Philadelphia and Detroit, each contains a larger Negro population than any of the largest southern cities including New Orleans, Houston, Atlanta, Memphis or Dallas.

Like others who came to this country before them, Negroes came North seeking better opportunities. And, in many instances, they did improve their lot. But problems remained and other problems, mainly in the creation of ghetto housing, arose. In spite of the combined efforts of many men of goodwill and in spite of the heartwarming and striking instances of individual progress, the pace of integration in housing has been slow. There are many reasons.

High among them is the barrier to the Negro's economic progress, which prevents much real movement...and we at the Commission have confirmed this since passage of the historic Sharkey-Brown-Isaacs (Fair Housing Practices) Law some four years ago. Secondly, while many white persons are more than tolerant, most have not as yet reached the point where they work actively to create integrated housing situations. The result, we all know, is segregated schooling and it can be just as real whether it is <u>de facto</u> or <u>de jure</u>.

A report issued by the Central Zoning Unit of the Board of Education in January of this year points up the seriousness of this problem. It showed that 102 out of

573 elementary schools in New York City were predominantly Negro or Puerto Rican. I won't belabor the point: facilities in these schools are often inferior to those available at predominantly white schools. As a part of the vicious circle, inequality is almost built-in...because Negro residential areas coincide with slum districts and old buildings can be expected to have obsolete facilities.

Segregated schools in our city were outlawed long before the United States Supreme Court's historic decision of May 17, 1954. We eliminated them, legally, in 1920. But many years later, Negro parents still found it necessary to petition the Board of Education in an attempt to correct obvious injustices.

In December of 1954, the Board of Education officially recognized that something had to be done. It acknowledged that segregated, racially homogeneous schools damage the personalities of minority group children, decrease motivation and impair their ability to learn (whether they happen to live in the North or in the South). Significantly, the Board added, "white children are also damaged...public school education in a racially homogeneous setting is socially unrealistic and blocks the attainment of the goals of democratic education, whether this segregation occurs by law or by fact".

The New York State Board of Regents made a similar statement in 1960, so that both the City and State were unanimous in suggesting that education should be "color conscious" rather than "color blind". But a declaration of policy is one thing, and actual achievement is another. And, this again, is where the Commission on Human Rights enters into the picture.

Reflecting enlightened educational attitudes as well as deep-seated community feelings, the Commission urged the Board of Education to adopt a seven-point program designed to translate policy statements into realities.

Very briefly, the Commission recommended high-level direction and staffing of a school integration program... the assignment of qualified teachers to schools with large minority group populations...in-service training programs ...expanded efforts to build community understanding...the use of school site selection policies to advance integration. And the Commission made another recommendation. It urged the adoption of a policy that we have since come to know as "open enrollment".

Today, open enrollment is one of the most tangible expressions of our city's official "open city" policy. On January 8th, the Board of Education reported that nearly 5,000 elementary and junior high school pupils were attending 127 schools outside their neighborhoods, under this program.

On April 5th of this month, the Board announced the further assignment of 3,591 pupils to open enrollment schools for next September. A total of 105 schools in all boroughs except Staten Island have been selected as receiving schools.

There is much more to the story of open enrollment. One aspect involves sheer numbers:

Some would ask whether New York City can really integrate its schools. Three-fourths of the children in public elementary schools in Manhattan are either Negro or Puerto Rican. In the city as a whole, 40 per cent are from these two groups. And the latest figures suggest that the percentages may be going up. In 1957, for example, there were 64 elementary schools in which the Negro-Puerto Rican enrollment exceeded 90 per cent. By January of this year, the number had increased to 102 -- constituting about 17.8 per cent of all the city's public elementary schools as a result of declining white enrollments.

On the other side of the ledger, all-white elementary schools decreased from 209 in 1957 to 217 in January of this year. But figures alone do not give us the full picture. We should know...all of us, that is...precisely where we are going and why. We should plan and act on the basis of understanding and objectives.

School desegregation under open enrollment has been positive and dynamic, but we must give serious thought to the next phase of the North's attack on school segregation. And we must clear away the cobwebs of misinformation and fuzzy thinking. How many people realize that:

1. School desegregation and integration are not identical.

2. Integration should involve specific school administrative approaches (e.g., curriculum changes and new teaching methods) and it should rest firmly on a foundation which recognizes the dynamics of social and psychological classroom activity. In other words, it requires changes -- geared to the most up-to-date thinking in both methods and approach.

3. And further that this total educational process should provide the tools, techniques and motivation for integrated extra-school, adult living.

Our actions here in New York...the situation recently spotlighted in New Rochelle...and the accelerated pace of activity in New Jersey, in Ohio, in Detroit, in Chicago and on the West Coast demolish the remnants of the myth that this is solely a southern problem. It is a national problem without doubt. But there are differences of degree. Progress in this field might be measured this way: First comes the elimination of legal segregation. Next there is movement toward desegregation. And, finally, there is the attainment of integration.

The South, in many instances, is at Step 1 on the way to Step 2...it is eliminating legal segregation and moving toward desegregation. The North, in many instances, is at Step 2 on the way to Step 3. In other words, it is moving...somewhat unsurely...from desegregation toward integration.

As I indicated earlier, we have found at the Commission on Human Rights that bias is becoming unfashionable in our city. And it would not be stretching a point to suggest that it was about time.

Men of vision have proclaimed for centuries that equality was or should be the base of man's relations with his fellows. This concept -- social justice -- is the keystone of the Judaic-Christain ethic.

The major social chord which the Hebrew prophets kept vibrating was justice. In its various usages, it meant order, law, right, legal right. The concept of social democracy developed hand in hand with the evolution of the idea of one God. And this principle, activated through love, is Christianity's major chord, its gift to social ethics.

Today, with the principles having been firmly established and with a degree of acceptance having been won, we must hold the warmth and dignity of this promise and move unfalteringly ahead a step or two. Now the time has come to make integration a cardinal principle in our modern democratic concept. We must strive to make integration one of the norms in our culture. And, having done so, we need not fear that whites as well as Negroes will be desirous of striving for it.

It is at this point in our development and in our thinking that the Commission needs understanding and assistance. Helpful suggestions will come from members of this panel, I am sure. Educators, generally, can play a vital role -- and Yeshiva University symbolizes this new kind of educational mission. This, as Dr. Belkin has so aptly phrased it, is "the higher moral purpose of education...".

This kind of education will continue to point the way to action.